



THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

“Who Are Those Guys?”

4:4

Revelation 4:4 Around the throne *were* twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.

We know that numbers in the Bible can be significant. And we have said that the Revelation relies heavily on your familiarity with the Old Testament.

What, then, might be the significance of the number **twenty-four** in the Old Testament?

Well, there happen to be two significant references to the number twenty-four that we will find helpful. Both are in First Chronicles.

The first is First Chronicles 24. Yes, that's right – chapter twenty-four... although that has no significance whatsoever!

What **is** significant to note is that in the chapter we are told how the priests and Levites who served in the Temple were organized. There were twenty-four divisions of priests (v1-19) and twenty-four divisions of Levites (v20-31). Each division was assigned a schedule on a rotating basis to minister in the temple, thus giving everyone the

opportunity of serving approximately two weeks each year. You might recall in the New Testament that Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, (Luke 1:5) belonged to the eighth course, the course of Abijah. He was serving his two-week stint when the angel Gabriel appeared to him with the news that Elizabeth would bear their child.

The second significant reference to the number twenty-four is in First Chronicles 27. The army, like the Levites, served in divisions. Twenty-four thousand men were on duty each month.

There were twenty-four divisions of priests and Levites. A division of twenty-four thousand soldiers were always on duty. The twenty-four divisions of the priests and Levites represented all the other priests. The twenty-four thousand on-duty soldiers represented the entire army.

We would therefore be on solid ground to conclude that the number twenty-four is a number of representation.

There were **twenty-four thrones** around God's throne. Lesser thrones around the throne of God would indicate His delegation of responsibilities in ruling and reigning. These thrones represent some group of individuals who will rule and reign with Jesus Christ.

Could they be angels? Nowhere in Scripture do angels ever rule or sit on thrones. The church, however, is repeatedly said to rule and reign with Christ (Revelation 2:26-27, 5:10, 20:4; Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30).

On the thrones were **elders**. Ancient cultures vested leadership and authority in those who were older and supposedly better experienced. The Jews adopted this form of government. At the time of Moses there were seventy elders governing the people. In the Book of Numbers you read,

Numbers 11:16 So the LORD said to Moses: "Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you.

There were seventy elders plus one, Moses. From this the Jews concluded that their supreme court, the Sanhedrin, should consist of seventy members plus one.

In the New Testament elders are men recognized by their spiritual maturity who oversee the church.

The Greek word translated here as **elders** is never used to refer to angels, only to men. The word elder would be inappropriate to refer to angels because they do not age.

From what we've learned thus far we conclude that the **elders** who sit on the **thrones** are men and not angels. They are men who represent either Israel or the church.

They were **clothed with white robes**. Angels are sometimes presented in white robes or garments (Mark 16:5; John 20:12; Acts 1:10), but saints also have white robes (Revelation 6:11, 7:9, 13-14) as a picture of their imputed righteousness (Isaiah 61:10, Revelation 3:5-18). The white robe is the garment of humans in Heaven. It is promised to the church in chapter three and to tribulation martyrs in chapter six.

They had crowns of gold upon their heads. **Crowns** are never promised to angels, nor are they ever seen wearing them. The word translated **crown** here is the victor's crown worn by those who have successfully competed and won the victory as Christ promised.

The twenty-four are definitely men. But we still don't know if they include Israel and the church.

Some people do believe these twenty-four elders represent Israel in combination with the church. The twenty-four elders would refer to the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles. One reason for believing this is because on each of the twelve gates into the New Jerusalem is the name of one of the twelve patriarchs; and on each of the foundations is the name of one of the twelve apostles (Revelation 21).

One problem with this view is that at the time of this vision Israel as a whole nation had not yet been redeemed.

What about the saints of the tribulation? Could they be represented on the thrones? Probably not. First of all they, too, have yet to be redeemed in the Revelation. And when we do see them in Heaven they are described like this:

Revelation 6:9 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

The tribulation martyrs are seen under the altar, not on thrones.

Now it may be that the twenty-four represent Israel and the church; or Israel, the tribulation saints, and the church. **But in any case they represent the church!**

The most likely option is that the elders represent the raptured church. We believe that immediately following our resurrection and rapture we will be rewarded by Jesus Christ. He will robe us in our white garments and give us our crown or crowns. Then we will begin our serving Him in Heaven which will include returning with Him at the end of the Tribulation on earth to rule and reign with Him over the Kingdom of Heaven on the earth He establishes.

Besides seeing the **twenty-four elders** we are told some of the things that they do in Heaven. Perhaps our future activities are things we ought to be training for right now.

We first see them seated in God's presence. The apostle Paul said something similar in Ephesians 2:4-6,

Ephesians 2:4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

Ephesians 2:5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Ephesians 2:6 and raised *us* up together, **and made *us* sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,**

In the future we will be seated with Jesus in Heaven. We are to see ourselves that way now as we serve Him on the earth.

It's not so much an encouragement to get alone with God in our devotions as it is to be busy serving Him. We're depicted on thrones *not in our closets!* We have His delegated authority. We have His resources and supply. We should be busy discovering our gifts and ministering to one another.

Look at it this way. There is a time for prayer and preparation. As someone once said, You can do more than pray; but you do nothing until you've prayed. But, once you've prayed, you take your position on the throne. You are in a place of delegated service. Get busy!

In the next chapter the [twenty-four elders](#) seek out John saying, [Weep not. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah has prevailed](#) (5:5). In other words they comfort John by reminding him of the truth that Jesus is victorious.

Lots of weeping goes on around us on earth. When it's not you doing the crying it should be you doing the comforting. But comfort someone with strength by reminding them Jesus is victorious. Tell them their light affliction is but for a moment and is working for them, not against them.

- being changed to bring change -
Later we'll see an elder ask John questions to spark spiritual discussion and to provide information and enlightenment (7:13). It reminds us we are to stir-up one another to love and good works.

We'll also see the [twenty-four elders](#) constantly singing and worshipping the Lord. Worship must therefore be an integral part of everything we do. Now I know that it can be argued that worship is not just singing; it is a lifestyle. But in Heaven we **will** be doing a lot of singing! Worship should be our motive in everything we do; but we must also see it as an activity, a very important activity.

In the realm of romantic love we understand the giving of flowers or gifts or the writing of cards and love notes. As the romance progresses it is not uncommon for those activities to begin to lessen. In the same way I love to get a surprise gift or love note from Pam, so

the Lord delights to hear from us in some special way. One of those is worship by singing to Him.

Can't carry a tune in a bucket? Hey, I love to hear my granddaughter babbling. In the same way the Lord receives your effort.

Don't like the style of music? It's the Person we are singing to that matters, not the style in which we're doing it. The singing isn't for us – to entertain us or to please us.

The **elders** in Heaven are said to **sing a new song** (5:9). We should thus be open to forms and styles that, though new, are nevertheless inspired.

You are looking at yourself in verse four – at yourself in the future. The only individual variable will be the adornment of your robe and the type and number of crowns. We earn these now as we are faithful in private and in public serving our Lord.

